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ABSTRACT

The student's college experience is perceived by the counseling staff at Highline Community College as a process of self-assessment and self-discovery. Professional resources and personal support to promote and enhance this developmental process are offered. The program is action-oriented and is designed to place the counselor in the mainstream of the educational process and the college experience. This active role in the learning process is carried out by means of individual counseling, courses in study skills, workshops for small groups, and a Learning Skills Laboratory. References are given. (Author/DE)

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LIAISON BETWEEN THE COLLEGE STUDY SKILLS CENTER AND COUNSELING SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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The college experience is perceived by the counseling staff at Highline Community College as a process of self-assessment and self-discovery. The counseling services offer professional resources and the personal support to promote and enhance this developmental process. The counseling program is action-oriented and is designed to place the counselor in the mainstream of the educational process and the college experience.

The traditional model of college counseling centers is inadequate in meeting the challenges posed by community college students. (2) The majority of those requesting counseling help seem to be seeking active relatedness, not clinical passivity. They seem to be seeking aid in "catching up," not "patching up." They seem to be comfortable in accepting the fact that they may have a developmental hang-up and enlist the counselor's help in working to overcome it.

In addition to the typical developmental challenges, the community college student is often fraught with problems which are primarily related to learning. Although the developmental tasks of the college years may include many aspects which are not academic or intellectual, the student must survive academically if he is to remain in the college environment. In the final analysis, the counselor in a college setting must justify his position as a member of the educational team by acknowledging that learning may indeed be one of the more germaine tasks of the college experience.

The special characteristics and needs of the community college student, and the very unique mission of the community college, requires the counselor within an educational environment to define quite specifically his special expertise. The need to define educational counseling operationally is based on the students' demands for help in developing the attitudes, skills and techniques essential to academic success.

A questionnaire was distributed to 200 freshman students entering the college winter quarter of this year. All of them indicated some doubts or concerns about their academic survival. From a list of services available at the counseling center, all students indicated an interest in at least one workshop oriented toward academic skill development. Fewer expressed an interest in a non-structured group experience such as college or psychosexual adjustment.

The counselors' active role in the students' learning, respectfully labeled as Educational Counseling (3) has four distinct dimensions at Highline: individual counseling, courses in study skills, workshops for small groups, and a Learning Skills Laboratory.

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(PAPER TO BE DISCUSSED AT IRA SEMINAR, MAY 1970.)

Individual Counseling

The counselor may help an individual student to identify the study techniques he uses, to assess their effectiveness, and to explore alternative approaches to studying. Becoming aware of the techniques used may indeed be the first step in the student's developing self-awareness and understanding. Alternative ways of studying become available to the student for consideration only if the counselor makes them available.

Self-help information sheets and brochures which describe techniques of study such as taking lecture notes, time scheduling, text reading, and test-taking are available on display racks in the counseling center for students to peruse. Although seemingly tons of paper are carried out of the counseling center in this form, counselors feel that the most effective way of helping the student develop more effective study skills is to discuss the material with the student, help him establish a strategy for using a particular technique, and setting an appointment at which time the experience can be evaluated by the student and the counselor.

In the process of helping the student form a strategy for success, one of the most difficult tasks is to help the student specify precisely what it is that he must do or learn in order to pass a course with a specific grade. This frequently necessitates that the student go to the teacher with very specific questions in an attempt to find out in performance or behavioral terms what the teacher expects. The counselor must prepare the student to ask the teacher for specifications and clarifications of course objectives and goals. (4) Knowing what the teacher wants is, in itself, tremendously helpful to the student, but such a clarification becomes invaluable as the student prepares a strategy for achieving a goal of academic accomplishment.

The counselor needs the skills, also, by which he may help the "emergency" case, the student who is immobilized by anxiety or panic before an examination or before a paper is due. He must have resources for "band-aid" treatment of study skills in his repertoire of professional skills in addition to being able to develop a long range study strategy tailored to a particular student's life style.

Study Skills Class

The traditional method of helping the student survive in the collegiate setting is by providing a course in "college adjustment and study skills," frequently taught by a counselor. Requirements of this course include registration, fees, and grades but no academic transferable credit is earned. The course is generally undersubscribed because it requires a commitment in the traditional sense of one quarter's time from the student. The course includes units of work and practice in study systems, note-taking, test taking, time schedule, etc. The course is perceived as being an appropriate experience for some students, but it is generally lacking in the flexibility to handle the specific demands of a student who needs rather discrete types of experiences rather than the whole predetermined treatment.

The assumption that a counselor is prepared to teach a study skills course is entirely false. Knowledge of study skills and educational counseling here-in defined are not common content in most counselor-training programs. The counselor needs to be prepared for his involvement with study skills.

Workshops for Small Groups

To overcome the disadvantages of the course-type study skills program, the counseling staff provides workshops on specific and discrete study skills topics which require the student to commit not more than one week's time, one hour per day. Workshops have been given in listening, note-taking, test-taking, critical reading, and

decision-making. Didactically-oriented group counseling experiences are organized for low-scholarship students to help them understand the learning process and the variables in self and the achievement environment which affect learning.

Our experience has been that study skills workshops have been well received by the students and enthusiastically acclaimed by the counselors as being an effective and satisfying technique. The didactic group seems to provide a degree of respectability in initiating group counseling. Once underway, interaction and the group process may develop, and frequently the group continues to convene after the topic of the workshop has been completed. The measure of success of the group is not this factor, however, since we are convinced that the primary purpose is to convey to the student a body of knowledge which is designed to help him become a better student.

Learning Skills Laboratory

The fourth dimension of counselors' involvement in the students' learning is a facility called the Learning Skills Laboratory. Developed with a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, it is a resource of the counseling center in which students with a need for individualized instruction to develop basic learning skills can find the professional help required for success.

Although the usual remedial classes in English and math are provided in the curriculum, deficiencies in basic learning skills frequently do not respond to group instruction. The assumption that students enrolled in a remedial course are equally handicapped in identical skills areas and that they will respond to identical treatment in a predetermined unit of time (i.e., a quarter) is ridiculous and frequently results in failure for the student once again. Rehabilitation of the educationally handicapped student may be a process requiring individualization and specialization. The counselor contributes his expertise in diagnosis and in experimentation, approaching learning deficiencies with a clinical model, from a humanistic orientation.

The basic assumptions on which an operational model was based were (1) if diagnosis were sufficiently specific in identifying the deficiency of the student so that he would be successful but challenged, (2) if selected instruction materials were available which would allow for entry for discrete units of work, (3) if these appropriate educational experiences were carefully managed, then (4) learning would occur.

Students who were seeking special help seemed to have problems in the skills areas of vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and basic arithmetic. These were the areas of basic skills on which we decided to focus.

We found that diagnostic instruments in the subject matter areas which isolated the specific strengths and weaknesses of the student were not available commercially. The norms and profiles of commercial tests, generally written as a criterion for eliminating students, were not a meaningful measure for accurate program placement. Diagnostic tests had to be developed by the Lab staff in math and in spelling which were related to specific units of instructional material.

The initial placement in a specific program provides a successful learning experience for the student in a skills area he has been unable to master previously. The student is trained to keep a chart of his performances so that he is always aware of his progress. The progress charts may also alert the counselor to difficulties the student is having.

A wide variety of instructional materials needed to be organized into packages or units of work which permitted use by students, counselors and instructors who were neither familiar with the materials nor expert in the subject matter area. Tests and materials needed to provide for self-diagnosis and self-prescription.

As the clinical approach to individualized remediation in basic skill areas became an on-going activity in the lab, some attention was shifted to other dimensions of the lab. Additional self-instructional materials were selected and made easily

available to the students. These materials supplemented classroom work and were used for exploration of interests not directly related to the classroom work. Many of the techniques and procedures used in the lab are applicable to the classroom and to programs which demand variety and flexibility for individualized instruction. Self-directed, individualized instructional units provide the flexibility colleges need to meet the demands placed upon them by members of the community who do not function on the quarter system. Clientele in the lab now includes students reviewing for the G.E.D. test, preparing to challenge a course, or preparing to take qualifying placement tests.

An evaluation of the 3-year project of developing the Learning Skills Laboratory will be completed by May. Certain patterns and trends are emerging and can be reported as observations at this time.

Students most likely to use the labs are male, averaging 22 years of age, goal-oriented and highly motivated. Females who work in the lab are frequently adequate students seeking specific help in a rather discrete subject area. Younger students seem to be unwilling to spend the time or effort in the lab, expecting instant solutions to their problems and finding the short-term workshop program more to their liking.

Students are generally very dependent upon the counselor for sustained reinforcement in their initial lab experiences. As progress is made, the student becomes less dependent and more able to direct and sustain his own efforts at educational rehabilitation. The counselors' evaluation of the students' general behavior indicates a perceived change in self-concept, self-respect and self-confidence. An attitudinal change towards learning and life is observed as progress is made in acquiring skills within the lab.

Summary Comments

The Learning Skills Laboratory experience at Highline Community College has been primarily an experimental project. The developmental phase of the project was complicated by the fact that it involved pioneering in a pilot project where the usual guidelines and conceptual models were either inadequate or did not exist. The counselors were faced with a task of learning appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to function effectively in the process of remediating academic problems while continuing their more traditional role as professionals in dealing with psychological-social problems. However, the feasibility of a counseling-remediation process was validated.

Perhaps the most profound influence of the Learning Skills Laboratory has come in the definition of the role for the counselor in the educational environment. The counselor who works with the educationally deficient student and uses this action-oriented approach to counseling and remediation adds, to his professional skills and academic role, an additional dimension uncommon in traditional counseling. The counselor need not become an expert in remedial subject matter once the materials have been developed but should have a very special set of skills and a unique attitude toward students with learning difficulties. The counselor needs to be able to isolate useful diagnostic information, to apply principles of learning, and have a spirit of experimentation and research. He needs to blend the learning and counseling processes so that each complements the other in achieving the behavioral objectives of the student. The counselor must have the creativity and courage to try new approaches and a willingness to forfeit armchair counseling for action-oriented counseling and a direct role in the learning process.

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